

PQ 2178

.S4

1904

Copy 1



Class PC 2.72

Book 34

Copyright N^o 1925

COPYRIGHT DEPOSIT



HONORE DE BALZAC

BY

MARY F. SANDARS

NEW YORK

DODD, MEAD & COMPANY

1904



368

HONORE DE BALZAC



HONORE DE BALZAC

BY

MARY F. SANDARS

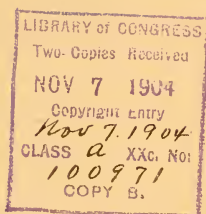
4 3 20
7 3 5

NEW YORK

DODD, MEAD & COMPANY

1904

PQ2178
S4
1904



Copyright, 1904,
BY
DODD, MEAD & COMPANY

CHAPTER I

Balzac's claims to greatness—The difficulty in attempting a complete Life—His complex character—The intention of this book.

AT a time when the so-called Realistic School is in the ascendant among novelists, it seems strange that little authentic information should have been published in the English language about the great French writer, Honoré de Balzac. Almost alone among his contemporaries, he dared to claim the interest of the world for ordinary men and women solely on the ground of a common humanity. Thus he was the first to embody in literature the principle of Burns that "a man for a' that"; and though this fact has now become a truism, it was a discovery, and an important discovery, when Balzac wrote. He showed that, because we are ourselves ordinary men and women, it is really human interest, and not sensational circumstance which appeals to us, and that material for enthralling drama can be found in the life of the most commonplace person—of a middle-aged shop-keeper threatened with bankruptcy, or of an elderly musician with a weakness for good dinners. At one blow he destroyed the unreal ideal of the Romantic School, who degraded man by setting up in his place a fantastic and impossible hero as the only theme

2 BALZAC'S COMPLEX CHARACTER

worthy of their pen; and thus he laid the foundation of the modern novel.

His own life is full of interest. He was not a recluse or a bookworm; his work was to study men, and he lived among men, he fought strenuously, he enjoyed lustily, he suffered keenly, and he died prematurely, worn out by the force of his own emotions, and by the prodigies of labour to which he was impelled by the restless promptings of his active brain, and by the ever-pressing need for money. Some of his letters to Madame Hanska have been published during the last few years; and where can we read a more pathetic love story than the record of his seventeen years' waiting for her, and of the tragic ending to his long-deferred happiness? Or where in modern times can more exciting and often comical tales of adventure be found than the accounts of his wild and always unsuccessful attempts to become a millionaire? His friends comprised most of the celebrated French writers of the day; and though not a lover of society, he was acquainted with many varieties of people, while his own personality was powerful, vivid, and eccentric.

Thus he appears at first sight to be a fascinating subject for biography; but if we examine a little more closely, we shall realise the web of difficulties in which the witer of a complete and exhaustive Life of Blazac would involve himself, and shall understand why the task has never been attempted. The great author's money affairs alone are so complicated that it is doubtful whether he ever mastered them himself,

and it is certainly impossible for any one else to understand them; while he managed to shroud his private life, especially his relations to women, in almost complete mystery. For some years after his death the monkish habit in which he attired himself was considered symbolic of his mental attitude; and even now, though the veil is partially lifted, and we realise the great part women played in his life, there remain many points which are not yet cleared up.

Consequently any one who attempts even in the most unambitious way to give a complete account of the great writer's life, is confronted with many blank spaces. It is true that the absolutely mysterious disappearances of which his contemporaries speak curiously are now partially accounted for, as we know that they were usually connected with Madame Hanska, and that Balzac's sense of honour would not allow him to breathe her name, except to his most intimate friends, and under the pledge of the strictest secrecy. His letters to her have allowed a flood of light to pour upon his hitherto veiled personality; but they are almost our only reliable source of information. Therefore, when they cease, because Balzac is with his lady-love, and we are suddenly excluded from his confidence, we can only guess what is happening.

In this way, we possess but the scantiest information about the journeys which occupied a great part of his time during the last few years of his life. We know that he travelled, regardless of expense and exhaustion, as quickly as possible, and by the very shortest route, to meet Madame Hanska; but this

4 BALZAC'S COMPLEX CHARACTER

once accomplished, we can gather little more, and we long for a diary or a confidential correspondent. In the first rapture of his meeting at Neufchâtel, he did indeed open his heart to his sister, Madame Surville; but his habitual discretion, and his care for the reputation of the woman he loved, soon imposed silence upon him, and he ceased to comment on the great drama of his life.

The great versatility of his mind, and the power he possessed of throwing himself with the utmost keenness into many absolutely dissimilar and incongruous enterprises at the same time, add further to the difficulty of understanding him. An extraordinary number of subjects had their place in his capacious brain, and the ease with which he dismissed one and took up another with equal zest the moment after, causes his doings to seem unnatural to us of ordinary mind. Léon Gozlan gives a curious instance of this on the occasion of the first reading of the "*Ressources de Quinola*."

Balzac had recited his play in the green-room of the Odéon to the assembled actors and actresses, and before a most critical audience had gone through the terrible strain of trying to improvise the fifth act, which was not yet written. He and Gozlan went straight from the hot atmosphere of the theatre to refresh themselves in the cool air of the Luxembourg Gardens. Here we should expect one of two things to happen. Either Balzac would be depressed with the ill-success of his fifth act, at which, according to Gozlan, he had acquitted himself so badly that

Madame Dorval, the principal actress, refused to take a *rôle* in the play; or, on the other hand, his sanguine temperament would cause him to overlook the drawbacks, and to think only of the enthusiasm with which the first four acts had been received. Neither of these two things took place. Balzac “n’y pensait déjà plus.” He talked with the greatest eagerness of the embellishments he had proposed to M. Decazes for his palace, and especially of a grand spiral staircase, which was to lead from the centre of the Luxembourg Gardens to the Catacombs, so that these might be shown to visitors, and become a source of profit to Paris. But of his play he said nothing.

The reader of “*Letters à l’Étrangère*,” which are written to the woman with whom Balzac was passionately in love, and whom he afterwards married, may, perhaps, at first sight congratulate himself on at last understanding in some degree the great author’s character and mode of life. If he dives beneath the surface, however, he will find that these beautiful and touching letters give but an incomplete picture; and that, while writing them, Balzac was throwing much energy into schemes, which he either does not mention to his correspondent, or touches on in the most cursory fashion. Therefore the perspective of his life is difficult to arrange, and ordinary rules for gauging character are at fault. We find it impossible to follow the principle, that because Balzac possessed one characteristic, he could not also show a diametrically opposite quality—that, for instance, because tenderness, delicacy of feeling, and a high sense of

reverence and honour were undoubtedly integral parts of his personality, the stories told by his contemporaries of his occasional coarseness must necessarily be false.

His own words, written to the Duchesse d'Abrantès in 1828, have no doubt a great element of truth in them: "I have the most singular character I know. I study myself as I might study another person, and I possess, shut up in my five foot eight inches, all the incoherences, all the contrasts possible; and those who think me vain, extravagant, obstinate, high-minded, without connection in my ideas,—a fop, negligent, idle, without application, without reflection, without any constancy; a chatterbox, without tact, badly brought up, impolite, whimsical, unequal in temper. are quite as right as those who perhaps say that I am economical, modest, courageous, stingy, energetic, a worker, constant, silent, full of delicacy, polite, always gay. Those who consider that I am a coward will not be more wrong than those who say that I am extremely brave; in short, learned or ignorant, full of talent or absurd, nothing astonishes me more than myself. I end by believing that I am only an instrument played on by circumstances. Does this kaleidoscope exist, because, in the soul of those who claim to paint all these affections themselves, so that they may be able, by the force of their imagination, to feel what they paint? And is observation a sort of memory suited to aid this lively imagination? I begin to think so." *

Certainly Balzac's character proves to the hilt the truth of the rule that, with few exceptions in the world's history, the higher the development the more complex the organisation and the more violent the clashing of the divers elements of the man's nature; so that his soul resembles a field of battle, and he wears out quickly. Nevertheless, because everything in Balzac seems contradictory, when he is likened by one of his friends to the sea, which is one and indivisible, we perceive that the comparison is not inapt. Round the edge are the ever-restless waves; on the surface the foam blown by fitful gusts of wind, the translucent play of sunbeams, and the clamour of storms lashing up the billows; but down in the sombre depths broods the resistless, immovable force which tinges with its reflection the dancing and play above, and is the genius and fascination, the mystery and tragedy of the sea.

Below the merriment and herculean jollity, so little represented in his books, there was deep, gloomy force in the soul of the man who, gifted with an almost unparralleled imagination, would yet grip the realities of the pathetic and terrible situations he evolved with brutal strength and insistence. The mind of the writer of "Le Père Goriot," "La Cousine Bette," and "Le Cousin Pons," those terrible tragedies where the Greek god Fate marches on his victims relentlessly, and there is no staying of the hand for pity, could not have been merely a wide, sunny expanse with no dark places. Nevertheless, we are again puzzled, when we attempt to realise the

personality of a man whose imagination could soar to the mystical and philosophical conception of "Séraphita," which is full of religious poetry, and who yet had the power in "César Birotteau" to invest prosaic and even sordid details with absolute verisimilitude, or in the "Contes Drôlatiques" would write, in Old French, stories of Rabelaisian breadth and humour. The only solution of these contradictions is that, partly perhaps by reason of great physical strength, certainly because of an abnormally powerful brain and imagination, Balzac's thoughts, feelings, and passions were unusually strong, and were endowed with peculiar impetus and independence of each other; and from this resulted a versatility which caused most unexpected developments, and which fills us of smaller mould with astonishment.

Nevertheless, steadfastness was decidedly the groundwork of the character of the man who was not dismayed by the colossal task of the *Comédie Humaine*; but pursued his work through discouragement, ill health, and anxieties. Except near the end of his life, when, owing to the unreasonable strain to which it had been subjected, his powerful organism had begun to fail, Balzac refused to neglect his vocation even for his love affairs—a self-control which must have been a severe test to one of his temperament.

This absorption in his work cannot have been very flattering to the ladies he admired; and one plausible explanation of Madame de Castries' coldness to his suit is that she did not believe in the devotion of a

lover who, while paying her the most assiduous court at Aix, would yet write from five in the morning till half-past five in the evening, and only bestow his company on her from six till an early bedtime. Even the adored Madame Hanska had to take a second place where work was concerned. When they were both at Vienna in 1835, he writes with some irritation, apparently in answer to a remonstrance on her part, that he cannot work when he knows he has to go out; and that, owing to the time he spent the evening before in her society, he must now shut himself up for fourteen hours and toil at "*Le Lys dans le Vallée*." He adds, with his customary force of language, that if he does not finish the book at Vienna, he will throw himself into the Danube!

The great psychologist knew his own character well when, in another letter to Madame Hanska, who has complained of his frivolity, he cries indignantly: "Frivolity of character! Why, you speak as a good *bourgeois* would have done, who, seeing Napoleon turn to the right, to the left, and on all sides to examine his field of battle, would have said, 'This man cannot remain in one place; he has no fixed idea!'"

This change of posture, though constant, as Balzac says, with real stability, is a source of bewilderment to the reader of his sayings and doings, till it dawns upon him that, though pride, policy, and the usual shrinking of the sensitive from casting their pearls before swine, Balzac was a confirmed *poseur*, so that what he tells us is often more misleading than his silence. Léon Gozlan's books are a striking instance

of the fact that, with all Balzac's jollity, his camaraderie, and his flow of words, he did not readily reveal himself, except to those whom he could thoroughly trust to understand him. Gozlan went about with Balzac very often, and was specially chosen by him time after time as a companion; but he really knew very little of the great man. If we compare his account of Balzac's feeling or want of feeling at a certain crisis, and then read what is written on the same subject to Madame Hanska, Balzac's enormous power of reserve, and his habit of deliberately misleading those who were not admitted to his confidence, may be gauged.

George Sand tells us an anecdote which shows how easily, from his anxiety not to wear his heart upon his sleeve, Balzac might be misunderstood. He dined with her on January 29th, 1844, after a visit to Russia, and related at table, with peals of laughter and apparently enormous satisfaction, an instance which had come under notice of the ferocious exercise of absolute power. Any stranger listening, would have thought him utterly heartless and brutal, but George Sand knew better. She whispered to him: "That makes you inclined to cry, doesn't it?"* He answered nothing; left off laughing, as if a spring in him had broken was very serious for the rest of the evening, and did not say a word more about Russia.

Balzac looked on the world as an arena; and as the occasion and the audience arose, he suited himself with the utmost aplomb to the part he intended to

* "Lettres à l'Etrangère."

Balzac is often difficult to discover. Sometimes he would pretend to be rich and prosperous, when he thought an editor would thereby be induced to offer him good terms; and sometimes, when it suited his purpose, he would make the most of his poverty and of his pecuniary embarrassments. Madame Hanska, from whom he situation after the failure of Werdet, whom he likens to the vulture that tormented Prometheus; but as it would not answer for Emile de Girardin, the editor of *La Presse*, to know much about Balzac's pecuniary difficulties, Madame de Girardin is assured that the report of Werdet's supposed disaster is false, and Balzac virtuously remarks that in the present century is never believed in.* Sometimes his want of candour appears to have its origin in his hatred to allow that he is beaten, and there is something childlike and naïve in his vanity. We are amused when he informs Madame Hanska that he is giving up the *Chronique de Paris*—which, after a brilliant flourish of trumpets at the start, was a complete failure—because the speeches in the Chambre des Députés are so silly that he abandons the idea of taking up politics, as he had intended to do by means of journalism. In a later letter, however, he is obliged to own that, though the *Chronique* has been, of course, a brilliant success, money is lacking, owing to the wickedness of several abandoned characters, and that therefore he has been forced to bring the publication to an end.

Of one vanity he was completely free. He did not

“Autour de la Table,” by George Sand.

pose to posterity. Of his books he thought much—each one was a masterpiece, more glorious than the last; but he never imagined that people would be in the least interested in his doings, and he did not care about public opinion of him. Nevertheless there was occasionally a gleam of joy, when some one unexpectedly showed spontaneous admiration for his work. For instance, in a Viennese concert-room, where the whole audience had risen to do honour to the great author, a young man seized his hand and put it to his lips, saying, “I kiss the hand that wrote ‘Séraphita,’ and Balzac said afterwards to his sister, “They may deny my talent, but the memory of that student will always comfort me.”

His genius would, he hoped, be acknowledged one day by all the world; but there was a singular and lovable absence of self-consciousness in his character, and a peculiar humility and childlikeness under his braggadocio and apparent arrogance. Perhaps this was the source of the power of fascination he undoubtedly exercised over his contemporaries. Nothing is more noticeable to any one reading about Balzac than the difference between the tone of amused indulgence with which those who knew him personally, speak of his peculiarities, and the contemptuous or horrified comments of people who only heard from others of his extraordinary doings.

He had bitter enemies as well as devoted friends; and his fighting proclivities, his objection to allow

* “La Genèse d'un Roman de Balzac,” p. 152, by Le Vicomte de Spoelberch de Lovenjoul.

that he is ever in the wrong, and his habit of blaming others for his misfortunes, have had a great effect in obscuring our knowledge of Balzac's life, as the people he abused were naturally exasperated, and took up their pens, not to give a fair account of what really happened, but to justify themselves against Balzac's aspersions. Werdet's book is an instance of this. Beneath the extravagant admiration he expresses for the "great writer," with his "heart of gold," a glint can be seen from time to time of the animus which inspired him when he wrote, and we feel that his statements must be received with caution, and do not add much to our real knowledge of Balzac.

Nevertheless, though there are still blank spaces to be filled, as well as difficulties to overcome and puzzles to unravel, much fresh information has lately been discovered about the great writer. notably the "*Lettres à l'Etrangère*," published in 1899, a collection of some of the letters written by Balzac, from 1833 to 1848, to Madame Hanska, the Polish lady who afterwards became his wife. These letters, which are the property of the Vicomte de Spoelberch de Lovenjoul, give many interesting details, and alter the earlier view of several points in Balzac's career and character; but the volume is large, and takes some time to read. It is therefore thought, that as those who would seem competent, by their knowledge and skill, to overcome the difficulties of writing a complete and exhaustive life are silent, a short sketch, which can claim nothing more than correctness of detail, may not be unwelcome. It contains no attempt to

give what could only be a very inadequate criticism of the books of the great novelist; for that, the reader must be referred to many able works by learned Frenchmen who have made a lifelong study of the subject. It is written, however, in the hope that the admirers of "Eugénie Grandet" and "La Père Goriot" may like to read something of the author of these masterpieces, and that even those who only know the great French novelist by reputation may be interested to hear a little about the restless life of a man who was a slave to his genius—was driven by its insistent voice to engage in work which was enormously difficult to him, to lead an abnormal and unhealthy life, and to wear out his exuberant physical strength prematurely. He died with his powers at their highest and his great task unfinished; and a sense of thankfulness for his own mediocrity fills the reader, when he reaches the end of the life of Balzac.

CHAPTER II

Balzac's appearance, dress, and personality—His imaginary world and schemes for making money—His family, childhood, and school-days.

ACCORDING to Théophile Gautier, herculean jollity was the most striking characteristic of the great writer, whose genius excelled in sombre and often sordid tragedy. George Sand, too, speaks of Balzac's "serene soul with a smile in it"; and this was the more remarkable, because he lived at a time when discontent and despair were considered the sign-manual of talent.

Physically Balzac was far from satisfying a romantic ideal of fragile and enervated genius. Short and stout, square of shoulder, with an abundant mane of thick black hair—a sign of bodily vigour—his whole person breathed intense vitality. Deep red lips, thick, but finely curved, and always ready to laugh, attested, like the ruddiness in his full cheeks, to the purity and richness of his blood. His forehead, broad, and unwrinkled, save for a line between the eyes, and his neck, thick, round, and columnar, contrasted in their whiteness with the colour in the rest of the face. His hands were large and dimpled—"beautiful hands," his sister calls them. He was proud of them, and had a slight prejudice against he gave special directions to David when his bust was

any one with ugly extremities. His nose, about which taken, was well cut, rather long, and square at the end, with the lobes of the open nostrils standing out prominently. As to his eyes, according to Gautier, there were none like them.* They had inconceivable life, light, and magnetism. They were eyes to make an eagle lower his lids, to read through walls and hearts, to terrify a wild beast—eyes of a sovereign, a seer, a conqueror.. Lamartine likens them to “darts dipped in kindness.” Balzac’s sister speaks of them as brown; but, according to other contemporaries. they were like brilliant black diamonds, with rich reflections of gold, the white of the eyeballs being tinged with the fire of the genius within, to read souls, to answer questions before they were asked, and at the same time to pour out warm rays of kindness from a joyous heart.

At all points Balzac’s personality differed from that of his contemporaries of the Romantic School--those transcendental geniuses of despairing temper, who were utterly hopeless about the prosaic world in which, by some strange mistake, they found themselves; and from which they felt that no possible inspiration for their art could be drawn. So little attuned were these unfortunates to their commonplace surroundings that, after picturing in their writings either fiendish horrors, or a beautiful, impossible atmosphere, peopled by beings out of whom all likeness to humanity had been eliminated, they had in-

* “Portraits Contemporains—Honoré de Balzac,” by Théophile Gautier.

frequently lost their mental balance altogether, or hurried by their own act out of a dull world which could never satisfy their lively imaginations. Balzac, on the other hand, loved the world. How, with the acute powers of observation, and the intuition almost to second sight, with which he was gifted, could he help doing so? The man who could at will quit his own personality, and invest himself with that of another; who would follow a workman and his wife on their way home at night from a music-hall, and listen to their discussions on domestic matters till he imbibed their life, felt their ragged clothing on his back, and their desires and wants in his soul,—how could he find life dull, or the most commonplace individual uninteresting?

In dress Balzac was habitually careless. He would rush to the printer's office, after twelve hours of hard work, with his hat drawn over his eyes, his hands thrust into shabby gloves, and his feet in shoes with high sides, worn over loose trousers, which were pleated at the waist and held down with straps. Even in society he took no trouble about his appearance, and Lamartine describes him as looking, in the salon of Madame de Garardin, like a schoolboy who has outgrown his clothes. Only for a short time, which he describes with glee in his letters to Madame Hanska, did he pose as a man of fashion. Then he wore a magnificent white waistcoat, and a blue coat with gold buttons; carried the famous cane, with a knob studded with turquoises, celebrated in Madame de Garardin's story, "La Canne de Monsieur de Bal-

zac"; and drove in a tilbury, behind a high-stepping horse, with a tiny tiger, whom he christened Anchise, perched on the back seat. This phase was quickly over, the horses were sold, and Balzac appeared no more in the box reserved for dandies at the Opera. Of the fashionable outfit, the only property left was the microscopic groom—an orphan, or whom Balzac took the greatest care, and whom he visited daily during the boy's last illness, a year or two after. Thenceforward he reverted to his usual indifference about appearances, his only vanity being the spotless cleanliness of his working costume—a loose dressing-gown of white flannel or cashmere, made like the habit of a Benedictine monk, which was kept in round the waist by a silk girdle, and was always scrupulously guarded from ink-stains.

Naïve as a child, anxious for sympathy, frankly delighted with his own masterpieces, yet modest in a fashion peculiar to himself, Balzac gave a dominant impression of kindness and bonhomie, which overshadowed even the idea of intellect. To his friends he is not in the first place the author of the "Comédie Humaine," designed, as George Sand rather grandiloquently puts it, to be "an almost universal examination of the ideas, sentiments, customs, habits, legislation, arts, trades, costumes, localities—in short, of all that constitutes the lives of his contemporaries"*—that claim to notice recedes into the background, and what is seen clearly is the *bon camarade*, with his great hearty laugh, his jollity, his flow

"Autour de la Table," by George Sand.

of language, and his jokes, often Rabelaisian in flavour. Of course there was another side to the picture, and there were times in his hardset and harrassing life when even *his* vivacity failed him. These moods were, however, never apparent in society; and even to his intimate men friends, such as Théophile Gautier and Léon Gozlan, Balzac was always the delightful, whimsical companion, to be thought of and written of afterwards with an amused, though affectionate smile. Only to women, his principal confidantes, who played as important a part in his life as they do in his books, did he occasionally show the discouragement to which the artistic nature is prone. Sometimes the state of the weather, which always had a great effect on him, the difficulty of his work, the fatigue of sitting up all night and his monetary embarrassments, brought him to an extreme state of depression, both physical and mental. He would arrive at the house of Madame Surville, his sister, who tells the story, hardly able to drag himself along, in a gloomy, dejected state, with his skin sallow and jaundiced.

"Don't console me," he would say in a faint voice, dropping into a chair; "it is useless—I am a dead man."

The dead man would then begin, in a doleful voice, to tell of his new troubles; but he soon revived, and the words came forth in the most ringing tones of his voice. Then, opening his proofs, he would drop back

"Yes, I am a wrecked man, sister!"



"Nonsense! No man is wrecked with such proofs as those to correct."

Then he would raise his head. his face would unpucker little by little, the sallow tones of his skin would disappear.

"My God, you are right!" he would say. "Those books will make me live. Besides, blind Fortune is here, isn't she? Why shouldn't she protect a Balzac as well as a ninny? And there are always ways of wooing her. Suppose one of my millionaire friends (and I have some), or a banker, not knowing what to do with his money, should come to me and say, 'I know your immense talents, and your anxieties: you want such-and-such a sum to free yourself; accept it fearlessly; you will pay me; your pen is worth millions!' That is *all I want*, my dear."*

Then the "child-man," as his sister calls him, would imagine himself a member of the Institute; then in the Chamber of Peers, pointing out and reforming abuses, and governing a highly prosperous country. Finally, he would end the interview with, "Adieu! I am going home to see if my banker is waiting for me"; and would depart, quite consoled, with his usual hearty laugh.

He lived, his sister tells us, to a great extent in a world of his own, peopled by the imaginary characters in his books, and he would gravely discuss its news, as others do that of the real world. Sometimes he was delighted with the grand match he had

* "Balzac, sa Vie et ses Œuvres, d'après la Correspondance," by Mme. L. Surville (*née de Balzac*).

planned for his hero; but often affairs did not go so well, and perhaps it would give him much anxious thought to marry his heroine suitably, as it was necessary to find her a husband in her own set, and this might be difficult to arrange. When asked about the past of one of his creations, he replied gravely that he "had not been acquainted with Monsieur de Jordy before he came to Nemours," but added that, if his questioner were anxious to know, he would try to find out. He had many fancies about names, declaring that those which are invented do not give life to imaginary beings, whereas those really borne by some one endow them with vitality. Léon Gozlan says that he was dragged by Balzac half over Paris in search of a suitable name for the hero of a story to be published in the *Revue Parisienne*. After they had trudged through scores of streets in vain, Balzac, to his intense joy, discovered "Marcas" over a small tailor's shop. to which he added, as "a flame, a plume, a star," the initial Z. Z. Marcas conveyed to him the idea of a great, though unknown, philosopher, poet, or silversmith, like Benvenuto Cellini; he went no farther, he was satisfied—he had found "*the name of names.*" *

Many are the amusing anecdotes told of Balzac's schemes for becoming rich. Money he struggled for unceasingly, not from sordid motives, but because it was necessary to his conception of a happy life. Without its help he could never be freed from his burden of debt, and united to the *grande dame* of his

* "Balzac en Pantouffles," by Léon Gozlan.

fancy, who must of necessity be posed in elegant toilette, on a suitable background of costly brocades and objects of art. Nevertheless, in spite of all his efforts, and of a capacity and passion for work which seemed almost superhuman, he never obtained freedom from monetary anxiety. Viewed in this light, there is pathos in his many impossible plans for making his fortune, and freeing himself from the strain which was slowly killing him.

Some of his projected enterprises were wildly fantastic, and prove that the great author was, like many a genius, a child at heart; and that, in his eyes, the world was not the prosaic place it is to most men and women, but an enchanted globe, like the world of "Treasure Island," teeming with the possibility of strange adventure. At one time he hoped to gain a substantial income by growing pineapples in the little garden at Les Jardies, and later on he thought money might be made by transporting oaks from Poland to France. For some months he believed that, by means of magnetism exercised on somnambulists, he had discovered the exact spot at Ponte à Pitre where Toussaint-Louverture hid his treasure, and afterwards the negroes he had employed to bury it, lest they should betray its hiding-place. Jules Sandeau and Théophile Gautier were chosen to assist in the enterprise of carrying off the hidden gold, and were each to receive a quarter of the treasure, Balzac, as the leader of the venture, taking the other half. The three friends were to start secretly and separately with spades and shovels, and, their work accomplished,

were to put the treasure on a brig which was to be in waiting, and were to return as millionaires to France. This brilliant plan failed, because none of the three adventures had at the moment money to pay his passage out; and no doubt, by the time that the necessary funds were forthcoming, Balzac's fertile brain was engaged on other enterprises.*

The foundation of his pecuniary misfortunes was laid before his birth, when his father, forty-five years old and unmarried, sank the bulk of his fortune in life annuities, so that his son was in the unfortunate position of starting life in very comfortable circumstances, and of finding himself in want of money just when he most needed it.

Balzac's father was born in Languedoc in 1746, and we are told by his son that he had been Secretary remembers hearing M. de Molleville cry out, "The Constitution ruined Louis XVI.. and the Charter will kill the Bourbons!" "No compromise" formed an essential part of the creed of the Royalists at the Restoration.

When M. de Balzac* married, in 1797, he was in charge of the Commissariat of the Twenty-second Military Division; and in 1798 he came to live in Tours, where he had bought a house and some land near the town, and where he remained for nineteen years. Here, on May 16th, 1799, St. Honoré's day, his son, the celebrated novelist, was born, and was christened Honoré after the saint.

* "Portraits Contemporains—Honoré de Balzac," by Théophile Gautier.

Old M. de Balzac was in his own way literary, and had written two or three pamphlets, one on his favourite subject—that of health. He seems to have been a man of much originality, many pecculiarities, and much kindness of heart. He was evidently impulsive, live his celebrated son, and he certainly made a culpable mistake, and a cruel one for his family, when he rashly concluded that he should always remain a bachelor, and arranged that his income should die with him. He afterwards hoped to repair the wrong he had thus done to his children, by outliving the other shareholders and obtaining a part of the immense capital of the Tontne. Fortunately for himself he possessed extraordinary optimism, and power of excluding from his mind the possibility of all unpleasant contingencies—qualities which he handed on in full measure to Honoré. He therefore kept himself happy in the monetary disappointments of his later life, by thinking and talking of the millions his children would inherit from their centenarian father. For their sakes it was necessary that he should take care of his health, and he considered that, by maintaining the “equilibrium of the vital forces,” there was absolutely no doubt that he would live for a hundred years more. Therefore he followed a strict regimen, and gave himself an infinite amount of trouble, as well as amusement, by his minute arrangements.

Unfortunately, however, the truth of his theories could never be tested, as he died in 1829, at the age of eighty-three, from the effects of an operation; and Madame de Balzac and her family were left to face

the stern facts of life, denuded of the rose-coloured haze in which they had been clothed by the kindly old enthusiast. Balzac's mother certainly had a hard life, and from what we hear of her nervous, excitable nature—inherited apparently from her mother, Madame Sallambier—we can hardly be astonished when Balzac writes to Madame Hanska, in 1835, that if her misfortunes do not kill her, it is feared they will destroy her reason. Nevertheless, she outlived her celebrated son, and is mentioned by Victor Hugo, when he visited Balzac's deathbed, as the only person in the room, except a nurse and a servant.*

She was many years younger than her husband—a beauty and an heiress; and she evidently had her own way with the easy-going old M. de Balzac, and was the moving spirit in the household: so that the ease and absence of friction in her early life must have made her subsequent troubles and humiliations especially galling. Besides Honoré, she had three children—Laure, afterwards Madame Surville; Laurence, who died young; and Henry, the black sheep of the family, who returned from the colonies, after having made an unsatisfactory marriage, and who, during the last years of Honoré de Balzac's life, required constant monetary help from his relations.

Her two younger children were Madame de Balzac's favourites, and they and their affairs gave her constant trouble. In 1822 Laurence married a M.

* The Balzac family will be accorded the "de" in this account of them.

Saint-Pierre de Montazaigle, apparently a good deal older than herself; and Honoré gives a very *couleur de rose* account of his future brother-in-law's family, in a letter written at the time of the engagement to Laure, who was already married. He does not seem so charmed with the bridegroom, *il troubadouro*, as with his surroundings, and remarks that he has lost his top teeth, and is very conceited, but will do well enough—as a husband. Every one is delighted at the marriage; but Laure can imagine *maman's* state of nervous excitement from her recollection of the last few days before her own wedding, and can fancy that he and Laurence are not enjoying themselves. "Nature surrounds roses with thorns, and pleasures with a crowd of troubles. Mamma follows the example of nature." *

Laurence's death, in 1826, must have been a terrible grief to the poor mother; but she may have realised later on that her daughter had escaped much trouble, as in 1836 the Balzac family threatened M. de Montzaigle with a lawsuit on the subject of his son, who was left to wonder about Paris without food, shoes, or clothes. We cannot suppose that any one with such sketchy views of the duties of a father could have been a particularly satisfactory husband; but perhaps Laurence died before she had time to discover M. de Montzaigle's deficiencies.

Henry, the younger son, appears to have been brought up on a different method from that pursued with Honoré, as we hear in 1821 that Madame

* "Choses Vues," by Victor Hugo.

de Balzac considered that the boy was unhappy and bored with school, that he was with canting people who punished him for nothing, and must be taken away. Evidently the younger son was the mother's darling; but her mode of bringing him up was not happy in its effects, as he seems to have given continual anxiety and trouble. He came back from the colonies with his wife; and by threatening to blow out his brains, he worked on his mother's feelings, and induced her to help him with money, and nearly to run herself. In consequence she was obliged for a time to take up her abode with Honoré, an arrangement which did not work well. Even when Henry was at last shipped off to the Indies, he continued to agitate his family by sending them pathetic accounts of his distress and necessities, and these letters from her much-loved son must have been peculiarly painful to Madame de Balzac.

Honoré and his mother seem never to have understood each other very well; and she was stern with him and Laure in their youth, while she lavished caresses on her younger children. Likeness to a father is not always a passport to a mother's favour, and Madame de Balzac does not appear to have realised her son's genius, and evidently feared that, without due repression in youth, the paternal type of imaginative optimist would be repeated.

She was not a tender mother in childhood, when indeed she saw little of Honoré, as she left him out at nurse till he was four years old, and sent him to school when he was eight; but later on in all prac-

tical matters she did her best for him, lending him money when he was in difficulties, and looking after his business affairs when he was away from Paris. She was evidently easily offended, and rather absurdly tenacious of her maternal dignity; so that sometimes the deference and submission of the great writer are surprising and rather touching. On the other hand it must be remembered that Honoré made great demands on his friends, that they were expected to accord continual sympathy and admiration, to be perfectly tactful in their criticisms, and were only very occasionally allowed to give advice. Therefore his opinion of his mother's coldness may have sprung from her failure to answer to the requirements of his peculiar code of affection, and not from any real want of love on her part.

Certainly her severity in his youth had the effect of concentrating the whole devotion of Honoré's childish heart on Laure, the *cara sorella* of his later years. She was a writer, the author of "Le Compagnon du Foyer." To her we owe a charming sketch of her celebrated brother, and she was the confidante of his hopes, ambitions, and troubles, of his sentimental friendships, and of the faults and embarrassments which he confided to no one else. Expressions of affection for her occur constantly in his letters, and in 1837 he writes to Madame Hanska that Laure is ill, and therefore the whole universe seems out of gear, and that he passes whole nights in despair because she is everything to him. The friendship between the

* "H de Balzac—Correspondance," vol i. p. 41.

brother and sister was deep, devoted, and faithful, as Balzac's friendships generally were—he did not care, as he said in one of his letters, for *amitis d'épiderme*—and the restriction put on his intercourse with his sister by the jealousy of M. Surville was one of the many troubles which darkened his later years.

Occasionally, indeed, there were disagreements between the brother and sister, when Honoré did not approve of Laure's aspirations for authorship. The only subject which really caused coldness on both sides, however—and this was temporary—was Laure's want of sympathy for Balzac's attachment to Madame Hanska; because she, like many of his friends, felt doubtful whether his passionate love was returned in anything like an equal measure. Perhaps, too, there may have lurked in the sister's mind a slight jealousy of his alien *grande dame*, who had stolen away her brother's heart from France, who moved in a sphere quite unlike that of the Balzac family, and whose existence prevented several advantageous and sensible marriages which she could have arranged for Honoré. Balzac, it must be allowed, was not always tactful in his descriptions of the perfections of the Hanska family, who were, of course, in his eyes, surrounded with aureoles borrowed from the light of his "polar star." It must have been distinctly annoying, when the virtues, talents, and charms of the Young Countess Anna were held up as an object lesson for Madame Surville's two daughters, who were no doubt, from their mother's point of view, quite as admirable as Madame Hanska's ewe lamb. Nevertheless, there was never

any real separation between the brother and sister; and it is to Laure that—certain of her participation in his joy—poor Balzac penned his delighted letter the day after his wedding, signed “Thy brother Honoré, at the summit of happiness.”

Laure’s own career was chequered. In 1820 she married an engineer, M. Midy de la Greneraye Surville, and from the first the marriage was not very happy, as Honoré writes, a month after it took place, to blame Laure for her melancholy at the separation from her family, and to counsel philosophy and piano practice. Possibly Balzac’s habits of ascendancy over those he loved, and his wonderful gift of fascination—a gift which often provides its possessor with bitter enemies among those outside its influence—made matters difficult for his brother-in-law, and did not tend to promote harmony between Laure and her husband. M. Surville probably became exasperated by useless attempts to vie in his wife’s eyes with her much-beloved brother—at any rate, in later years he was tyrannical in preventing their intercourse, and we hear of the unfortunate Laure coming in secret to see Balzac, on her birthday in 1836, and holding a watch in her hand, because she did not dare to stay away longer than twenty minutes. There were other worries for Laure and her husband, for, like the rest of the Balzac family, they were in continual difficulty about money matters. M. Surville seems to have been a man of enterprise, and to have had many schemes on hand—such as making a lateral canal on the Loire from Nantes to Orleans, building a bridge

in Paris, or constructing a little railway. Speaking of the canal, Balzac cheerfully and airily remarked in 1836 that only a capital of twenty-six millions of francs required collecting, and then the Survilles would be on the high road to prosperity. This trifling matter was not after all arranged, if we may judge from the fact that in 1849 the Survilles moved to a cheap lodging, and were advised by Balzac, in a letter from Russia, to follow his habit of former days, and to cook only twice a week. In fact, they were evidently passing through one of those monetary crises to which we become used when reading the annals of the Balzacs, and which irresistibly remind the reader of similar affairs in the Micawber family.

In spite of the friction on the subject of Madame Surville, there was never apparently any actual breach between Honoré and his brother-in-law; indeed, he speaks several times of working amicably with M. Surville, in a vain attempt to put in order the hopelessly involved web of family affairs. He evidently had great faith in his brother-in-law's plans for making his fortune, and took the keenest interest in them, even offering to go over to London, to sell an invention for effecting economy in the construction of inclined planes on railways. But M. Surville changed his mind at the last, and Balzac never went to England after till.

Honoré and Laure were together during the time of their earliest childhood, as they were left at the cottage of the same foster-mother, and did not come home till Honoré was four years old. His sister says,

"My recollections of his tenderness date far back. I have not forgotten the headlong rapidity with which he ran to save me from tumbling down the three high steps without a railing, which led from our nurse's room to the garden. His loving protection continued after we returned to our father's house, where, more than once, he allowed himself to be punished for my faults, without betraying me. Once, when I came upon the scene in time to accuse myself of the wrong, he said, 'Don't acknowledge next time—I like to be punished for you.' " *

Both children were in great awe of their parents, and Honoré's fear of his mother was extreme. Years after, he told a friend that he was never able to hear her voice without a trembling which deprived him of his faculties. Their father treated them with uniform kindness, but Honoré's heart was filled with love for his kind grandparents, to whom he paid a visit in Paris in 1604. He came back to Tours with wonderful stories of the beauties of their house, their garden, and their big dog Mouche, with whom he had made great friends. The news of his grandfather's death a few months later was a great grief to him, and made a deep impression on his childish mind. His sister tells us that long afterwards, when the two were receiving a reprimand from their mother, and he saw Laure unable to control a wild burst of laughter, which he knew would lead to serious consequences, he tried

* "Balzac, sa vie et ses œuvres, d'après sa correspondance," by Madame L. Surville (see de Balzac.)

to stop her by whispering in tragic tones, "Think about your grandfather's death!"

He was a child of very deep affections and warmth of heart, but he did not show any special intelligence. He was lively, merry, and extremely talkative, but sometimes a silent mood would fall on him, and perhaps, as his sister says, his imagination was then carrying him to distant worlds, though the family only thought the chatterbox was tired. In all ways, however, he was in these days a very ordinary child, devoted to fairy stories, fond of the popular nursery amusement of making up plays, and charmed with the excruciating noise he brought out of a little red violin. This he would sometimes play on for hours, till even the faithful Laure would remonstrate, and he would be astonished that she did not realise the beauty of his music.

This happy childish life, chastened only by the tremors which both children left when taken by their governess in the morning and at bedtime into the stern presence of their mother, did not last very long for Honoré. When he was eight years old (his sister says seven, but this seems to be a mistake), there was a sudden change in his life, as the home authorities decided that it was time his education should begin in good earnest. He was therefore taken from the day school at Tours, and sent to the semi-military college founded by the Oratorians in the sleepy little town of Vendôme. On page 7 of the school record there is the following notice: "No. 460. Honoré Balzac, âgé de huit ans un mois. A eu la petite

vérole, sans infirmités. Caractère sanguin, s'échauffant, et sujet à quelques fièvres de chaleur. Entré au pensionnat le 22 juin, 1807. Sorti, le 22 août, 1813. S'adresser à M. Balzac, son père, à Tours."* Thus is summed up the character of the future whiter of the "Comédie Humaine," and there is apparently nothing remarkable or precocious about the boy, as his quick temper is his most salient point in the eyes of his masters. It will be noticed, too, that the "de," about which Balzac was very particular, and which was the occasion of many scoffing remarks on the part of his enemies, does not appear on his register.

Honoré was a small boy to have been completely separated from home, and the whole scheme of education as devised by the Oratorian fathers appears to have been a strange one. One of the rules forbade outside holidays, and Honoré never left the college once during the six years he was at school; so that there was no supervision from his parents, and no chance of complaint if he were unhappy or ill treated. His family came to see him at Easter and also at the prize-givings; but on these occasions, to which he looked forward, his sister tells us, with eager delight, reproaches were generally his portion, on account of his want of success in school work. In "Louis Lambert" he gives an interesting account of the college, which was in the middle of the town on the little river Loir, and contained a chapel, theatre, infirmary, bakery, and gardens. There were two or three hundred pupils, divided according to their ages or attain-

* "Balzac au Collège," by Champfleury.

ments into four classes—*les grands, les moyens, les petits*, and *els minimes*—and each class had its own class-room and courtyard. Balzac was considered the idlest and most apathetic boy in his division, and was continually punished. Reproaches, the ferule, the dark cell, were his portion, and with his quick and delicate senses he suffered intensely from the want of air in the class-rooms. There, according to the graphic picture in “*Lous Lambert*,” everything was dirty, and eighty boys inhabited a hall, in the centre of which were two buckets full of water, where al washed their faces and hands every morning, the water being only renewed once in the day. To add to the odours, the air was vitiated by the smell of pigeons killed for fête days, and of dishes stolen from the refectory, and kept by the pupils in their lockers. The boy who, in the future, was to awaken actual physical disgust in his readers by his description of the stuffy and dingy boarding-house dining-room in “*Le Père Goriot*,” was crushed and stupefied by his surroundings, and would sit for hours with his head on his hand, not attempting to learn, but gazing dreamily at the clouds, or at the foliage of the trees in the court below. No wonder that he was the despair of his masters, and that his famous “*Traité de la volonté*,” which he composed instead of preparing the ordinary school work, was summarily confiscated and destroyed. So many were the punishment lines given him to write, that his holidays were almost entirely taken up, and he had not six days of liberty the whole time that he was at the college.

In addition to the troubles incident to Honoré's peculiar temperament and genius, he had in the winter, like the other pupils, to submit to actual physical suffering. The price of education included also that of clothing, the parents who sent their children to the Vendôme College paying a yearly sum, and therewith comfortably absolving themselves from all trouble and responsibility. But the results were not happy for the boys, who dragged themselves painfully along the icy roads in miserable remnants of boots, their feet half dead, and swollen with sores and chilblains. Out of sixty children, not ten walked without torture, and many of them would cry with rage as they limped along, each step being a painful effort; but with the invincible physical pluck and moral cowardice of childhood, would hide their tears, for fear of ridicule from their companions.

Nevertheless, even to Balzac, who was peculiarly unfitted for it, life at the college had its pleasures. The food appears to have been good, and the discipline at meals not very severe, as a regular system of exchange of helpings to suit the particular tastes of each boy went on all through dinner, and caused endless amusement. Some one who had received peas as his portion would prefer dessert, and the proposition "Un dessert pour des pois" would pass from Other pleasures were the pet pigeons, the gardens, the sweets bought secretly during the waks, the permission to play cards and to have theatrical performances during the holidays, the military music, the games, and the slides made in winter. Best of

all, however, was the shop which opened in the classroom every Sunday during playtime for the sale of boxes, tools, pigeons of all sorts, mass-books (for these there was not much demand), knives, balls, pencils—everything a boy could wish for. The proud possessor of six francs—meant to last for the term—felt that the contents of the whole shop were at his disposal. Saturday night was passed in anxious yet rapturous calculations, and the responses at Mass during that happy Sunday morning mingled themselves with thoughts of the glorious time coming in the afternoon. Next Sunday was not quite to delightful, as probably there were only a few sous left, and possibly some of the purchases were broken, or had not turned out quite satisfactorily. Then, too, there was a long vista of Sundays in the future, without any possibility of shopping; but after all a certain amount of compounding is always necessary in life, and an intense short joy is worth a grey time before and after.

When Balzac was fourteen years old, his life at the college came suddenly to an end, as, to the alarm of his masters, he was attacked by coma with feverish symptoms, and they begged his parents to take him at once. It is curious to notice that the Fathers make no reference to this failure in their educational system in the school record, where there is no reason given for Honoré's departure from school. Certainly his life at Vendôme was not very healthy, as sometimes for idleness, inattention, or impertinence he was for months shut up every day in a niche six feet

square, with a wooden door pierced by holes to let in air. When Champfleury visited the college years afterwards, the only person who remembered Balzac was the old Father who had charge of these cells, and he spoke of the boy's "great black eyes." Confinement in these *culottes de bois*, as they were called, was much dreaded by the boys, and the punishment seems barbarous and senseless, except from the point of view of getting rid of troublesome pupils. Balzac, however, welcomed the relief from ordinary school life, and indeed manoeuvred to be shut up. In the cells he had leisure to dream as he pleased, he was free from the drudgery of learning his lessons, and he managed to secrete books in his cage, and thus to absorb the contents of most of the volumes in the fine library collected by the learned Oratorian founders of the college. The ideas in many of the learned tomes were far beyond his age, but he understood them, remembered them afterwards, and could recall in later years not only the thoughts in each book, but also the disposition of his mind when he read them. Naturally this precocity of intellect caused brain fatigue, though this would never have been suspected by the Fathers of their idlest pupil.

Honoré, his sister tells us, came home thin and puny, like a somnambulist sleeping with open eyes, and his grandmother groaned over the strain of modern education. At first he heard hardly any of the questions that were put to him, and his mother was obliged to disturb him in reveries, and to insist on his taking part in games with the rest of the fami-

ly; but with the fresh air and the home life he soon recovered his health and spirits, and became again a lively, merry boy. He attended lectures at the college near, and had tutors at home; but great efforts were necessary in order to get into his head the requisite amount of Greek and Latin. Nevertheless, at times he was astonishing, or might have been to any one with powers of observation. On these occasions he made such extraordinary and sagacious remarks that Madame de Balzac, in her character of represser, felt obliged to remark sharply, "You cannot possibly understand what you are saying, Honoré!" When Honoré, who dared not argue, looked at her with a smile, she would, with the ease of absolute authority, escape from the awkwardness of the situation by remarking that he was impertinent. He was already ambitious, and would tell his sisters and brother about his future fame, and accept with a laugh the teasing he received in consequence.

It must have been during this time that he grew to love with an enduring love the scenery of his native province of Touraine, with its undulating stretches of emerald green, through which the Loire or the Indre would like a long ribbon of water, while lines of polars decked the banks with moving lace. It was a smiling country, dotted with vineyards and oak woods, while here and there an old gnarled walnut tree stood in rugged independence. The susceptible boy, lately escaped from the abominations of the stuffy school-house, drank in with rapture the warm scented air, and often describes in his novels the land-

scape of the province where he was born, which he loves, in his own words, "as an artist loves art." Another lasting memory * was that of the poetry and splendour of the Cathedral of Saint-Gatien in Tours, where he was taken every feastday. There he watched with delight the beautiful effects of light and shade, the play of colour produced by the rays of sunlight shining through the old stained glass, and the strange, fascinating effect of the clouds of incense, which enveloped the officiating priests, and from which he possibly derived the idea of the mists which he often introduces into his descriptions.

* See "Balzac, sa Vie et ses Œuvres, d'après sa Correspondance," par Madame L. Surville (née de Balzac).

CHAPTER III

Balzac's tutors and law studies—His youth, as pictured in the "Peau de Chagrin"—His father's intention of making him a lawyer—He begs to be allowed to become a writer—Is allowed his wish—Life in the Rue Lesdiguières, privations and starvation—He writes "Cromwell," a tragedy.

At the end of 1814 the Balzac family moved to Paris, as M. de Balzac was put in charge of the Commissariat of the First Division of the Army. Here they took a house in the Rue de RoiDoré, in the Marais, and Honoré continued his studies with M. Lepitre, Rue SaintLouis, and MM. Sganzer and Benzelin, Rue de Thorigny, in the Marais. To the influence of M. Lepitre, a man who, unlike old M. de Balzac and many other worthy people, was an ardent Legitimist *before* as well as *after* 1815, we may in part trace the strength of Balzac's Royalist principles. On the 13th Vindémiaire, M. Lepitre had presided over one of the sections of Paris which rose against the Convention; and though on one occasion he failed in nerve, his services during the Revolution had been most conspicuous. On his reception at the Tuileries by the Duchesse d'Angoulême, she used these words, never to be forgotten by him to whom they were addressed: "I have not forgotten, and I shall never forget, the services you have rendered to my family."*

We can imagine the enthusiasm and delight with which the man who, whatever might be his shortcomings in courage, had always remained firm to his Royalist principles, and who had been a witness of the terrible anguish of the prisoners in the Temple, would hear these words from the lips of the lady who stood to him as Queen—the Antigone of France—the heroine whose sufferings had made the heart of every loyal Frenchman bleed, the brave woman who, according to Napoleon, was the one man of her family. Lepitre's visit to the Tuileries took place on May 9th, 1814, the year that Balzac began to take those lessons in rhetoric which first opened his eyes to the beauty of the French language. During Lepitre's tuition he composed a speech supposed to be addressed by the wife of Brutus to her husband, after the condemnation of her sons, in which, Laure tells us, the anguish of the mother is depicted with great power, and Balzac shows his wonderful faculty for entering into the souls of his personages. Lepitre had evidently a powerful influence over his pupil, and as a master of rhetoric he would naturally be eloquent and have command of language, and in consequence would be most probably of fiery and enthusiastic temperament. We can imagine the fervour with which the impressionable boy drank in stories of the sufferings of the royal family during their imprisonment in the Temple, and strove not to miss a syllable of his master's magnificent exordiums, which glowed with the light and heat of impassioned loyalty.

No doubt Balzac's "Une Vie de Femme," a touch-

ing account of the life of the Duchesse d'Angoulême, which appeared in the *Reformateur* in 1832, was partly compiled from the reminiscences of his old master; and when we hear of his ardent defence of the Duchesse de Berry, or that he treasured a tea-service which was not of any intrinsic value, because it had belonged to the Duc d'Angoulême, we see traces of his intense love and admiration for the Bourbon family.

Nevertheless, in that big, well-balanced brain there was room for many emotions, and for a wide range of sympathies. The many-sidedness which is a necessary characteristic of every great psychologist, was a remarkable quality in Balzac. He may have been present at Napoleon's last review on the Carrousel—at any rate he tells in "La Femme de Trente Ans" how the man "thus surrounded with so much olve, enthusiasm, devotion, prayer—for whom the sun had driven every cloud from the sky—sat motionless on his horse, three feet in advance of the dazzling escort that followed him," and that an old grenadier said, "My God, yes, it was always so; under fire at Wagram, among the dead in the Moskowa, he was quiet as a lamb—yes, that's he!" Balzac's admiration for Napoleon was intense, as he shows in many of his writings, and his proudest boast is to be found in the words, said to have been inscribed on a statuette of Napoleon in his room in the Rue Cassini, "What he has begun with the sword, I shall finish with the pen."

None of Balzac's masters thought much of his

"Biographie Universelle," by De Michaud.

talents, or perceived anything remarkable about him. He returned home in 1816, full of health and vigor, the personification of happiness; and his conscientious mother immediately set to work to repair the deficiencies of his former education, and sent him to lectures at the Sorbonne, where he heard extempore speeches from such men as Villemain, Guizot, and Cousin. Apparently this teaching opened a new world to him, and he learned for the first time that education can be more than a dull routine of dry facts, and felt the joy of contact with eloquence and learning. Possibly he realised, as he had not realised before—Tours being, as he says, a most unliterary town—that there were people in the world who looked on things as he did, and who would understand, and not laugh at him or snub him. He always returned from these lectures, his sister says, glowing with interest, and would try as far as he could to repeat them to his family. Then he would rush out to study in the public libraries, so that he might be able to profit by the teaching of his illustrious professors, or would wander about the Latin Quarter, to hunt for rare and precious books. He used his opportunities in other ways. An old lady living in the house with the Balzacs had been an intimate friend of the great Beaumarchais. Honoré loved to talk to her, and would ask her her questions, and listen with the greatest interest to her replies, till he could have written a Life of the celebrated man himself. His powers of acute observation, interest, and sympathy—in short, his intense faculty for human fellowship, as well as his capacity

for assimilating information from books—were already at work; and the future novelist was consciously or unconsciously collecting material in all directions.

In 1816 it was considered necessary that he should be started with regular work, and he was established for eighteen months with a lawyer, M. de Guillonnet-Merville, who was, like M. Lepitre, a friend of the Balzac family, and an ardent Royalist. Eugene Scribe—another amateur lawyer—as M. de Guillonnet-Merville indulgently remarked, had just left the office, and Honoré was established at the desk and table vacated by him. He became very fond of his chief, whom he has immortalised as Derville in “Une Ténébreuse Affaire,” “Le Père Goriot,” and other novels; and he dedicated to this old friend “Un Episode sous la Terreur,” which was published in 1846, and is a powerful and touching story of the remorse felt by the executioner of Louis XVI. After eighteen months in this office, he passed the same time in that of M. Passez, a notary, who lived in the same house with the Balzacs, and was another of their intimates.

Balzac does not appear to have made any objection to these arrangements, though his legal studies cannot have been congenial to him; but they were only spoken of at this time as a finish to his education—old M. de Balzac, *homme de loi* himself, remarking that no man's education can be complete without a knowledge of ancient and modern legislation, and an acquaintance with the statutes of his of his own coun-

try. Perhaps Honoré, wiser now than in his school-days, had learnt that all knowledge is equipment for the work of the world, and especially for a literary life. He certainly made good use of his time, and the results can be seen in many of his works, notably in the "Ténébreuse Affaire," which contains in the account of the famous trial a masterly exposition of the legislature of the First Empire, or in "César Birotteau," which shows such thorough knowledge of the laws of bankruptcy of the time that its complicated plot cannot be thoroughly understood by any one unversed in legal matters.

Honoré was very well occupied at this time, and his mother must have felt for once thoroughly satisfied with him. In addition to his study of law, he had to follow the course of lectures at the Sorbonne and at the College of France; and these studies were a delightful excuse for a very fitful occupation of his seat in the lawyer's office. Besides his multifarious occupations, he managed in the evening to find time to play cards with his grandmother, who lived with her daughter and son-in-law. The gentle old lady spoiled Honoré, his mother considered, and would allow him to win money from her, which he joyfully expended on books. His sister, who tells us this, says, "He always loved those games in memory of her; and the recollection of her sayings and of her gestures used to come to him like a happiness which, as he said, he wrested from a tomb."

Other recollections of this time were not so pleasant. Honoré wished to shine in society. No doubt

the two "immense and sole desires—to be famous and to be loved"—which haunted him continually, til he at last obtained them at the cost of his life, were already at work with him, and he longed for the tender glances of some charming *demoiselle*. At any rate he took dancing-lessons, and prepared himself to enter with grace into ladies society. Here, however, a terrible humiliation awaited him. After all his care and pains, he slipped and fell in the ball-room, and his mortification at the smiles of the women round was so great that he never danced agan, but looked on henceforward with the cynicism which he expresses in the "Peau de Chagrin." That wonderful book, side by side with its philosophical teaching, gives a graphic picture of one side of Balzac's restless, feverish youth, as "Louis Lambart" does of his repressed childhood. Neither Louis Lambert nor the morbid and selfish Raphael give, however, the slightest indication of Balzac's most salient characteristic both as boy and youth—the healthy *joie de vivre*, the gaity and exubearnt merriment, of which his contemporaries speak constantly, and which shone out undimmed even by the wretched health and terrible worries of the last few years of his life. In his books, the bitter and melancholy side of things reigns almost exclusively, and Balzac, using Raphael as his mouthpiece, says: "Women one and all have condemned me. With tears and mortification I bowed before the decision of the world; but my distress was not barren. I determined to revenge myself on society; I would dominate the feminine intellect, and so have the femi-

nine soul at my mercy; all eyes should be fixed upon me, when the servant at the door announced my name. I had determined from my childhood that I would be a great man. I said with André Chénier, as I struck my forehead, 'There is something underneath that!' I felt, I believed, the thought within me that I must express, the system I must establish, the knowledge I must interpret." In another place in the same book the bitterness of his social failure again peeps out: "The incomprehensible bent of women's minds appears to lead them to see nothing but the weak points in a clever man and the strong points of a fool."

Reading these words, we can imagine poor Honoré, a proud, supersensitive boy, leaning against the wall in the ball-room, and watching enviously while agreeable nonentities basked in the smiles he yearned for. It was a hard lot to feel within him the intuitive knowledge of his genius; to hear the insistent voice of his vocation calling him not to be as ordinary men, but to give his message to the world; and yet to have the miserable consciousness that no one believed in his talents, and that there was a huge discrepancy between his ambition and his actual attainments.

In 1820 Honoré attained his majority and finished his legal studies. Unfortunately the pecuniary misfortunes which were to haunt all this generation of the Balzac family were beginning—as old M. de Balzac had lost money in two speculations, and now at the age of seventy-four was put on the retired list, a change which meant a considerable diminution of income. He therefore explained to his son—

Madame Surville tells us—that M. Passez, to whom he had formerly been of service, had in gratitude offered to take Honoré into his office, and at the end of a few years would leave him his business, when, with the additional arrangement of a rich marriage, a prosperous future would be assured to him. Old M. de Balzac did not specify the nature of the service which was to meet with so rich a reward; and as he was a gentleman with a distinct liking for talking of his own doings, we may amuse ourselves by supposing that it had to do with these Red Republican days which he was not fond of recalling.

Great was Honoré's consternation at this news. In the first place, owing to M. de Balzac's constant vapourings about the enormous wealth he would leave to his children, it is doubtful whether Honoré, who was probably not admitted to his parents' confidence, had realised up to this time that he would have to earn his own living. Then, if it *were* necessary for him to work for his bread, he now knew enough of the routine of a lawyer's office to look with horror on the prospect of drawing up wills, deeds of sale, and marriage settlements for the rest of his life. He never forgave the legal profession the shock and the terror he experienced at this time, and his portraits of lawyers, with some notable exceptions, are marked by decided animus. For instance, in "*Les Français peints par eux-mêmes*," edited by Cummer, the notary, as described by Balzac, has a flat, expressionless face and wears a mask of bland silliness; and in "*Paméla Giraud*" one of the characters remarks, "A

lawyer who talks to himself—that reminds me of a pastrycook who eats his own cakes.” It was rather unfair to decry all lawyers, because of the deadly fear he felt at the prospect of being forced into their ranks, as there is little doubt that he would have shrunk with like abhorrence from any business proposed to him. His childish longing for fame had developed and taken shape, and for him, if he lacked genius, there was no alternative but the dragging out of a worthless and wearying existence. Conscious of his powers, it was a time of struggle, of passionate endeavour, possibly of bewilderment; with the one great determination standing firm in the midst of a chaos of doubt and difficulty—the determination to persevere, and to become a writer at any cost.

He therefore, to his father’s consternation, announced his objection to following a legal career, and begged to be allowed an opportunity of proving his literary powers. Thereupon there were lively discussions in the family; but at last the kindly M. de Balzac, apparently against his wife’s wishes, yielded to his son’s earnest entreaties, and allowed him two years in which to try his fortune as a writer. The friends of the family were loud in their exclamations of disapproval at the folly of this proceeding, which would, they said, waste two of the best years of Honoré’s life. As far as they could see, he possessed no genius; and even if he *were* to succeed in a literary career, he would certainly not gain a fortune, which after all was the principal thing to be considered.

However, either the strenuousness and force of Honoré's arguments, or the softness of his father's heart, prevailed in his favour; and in spite of the opposition of the whole of his little world, he was allowed to have his own way, and to make trial of his powers. The rest of the family retired to Villeparisis, about sixteen miles from Paris, and he was established in a small attic at No. 9, Rue Lesdiguères, which was chosen by him for its nearness to the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, the only public library of which the contents were unknown to him. At the same time, appearances, always all-important in the Balzac family, were observed, by the fiction that Honoré was at Alby, on a visit to a cousin; and in this way his literary venture was kept secret, in case it proved unsuccessful.

Having arranged this, and asserted himself to the extent of insisting that his son should be allowed a certain amount of freedom in choosing his career, even if he fixed on a course which seemed suicidal, old M. de Balzac appears to have retired from the direction of affairs, and to have left his energetic wife to follow her own will about details. There was no doubt in that lady's mind as to the methods to be pursued. Her husband had been culpably weak, and had allowed himself to be swayed by the freak of a boy who hated work and wanted an excuse for idleness. Honoré must be brought to reason, and be taught that "the way of transgressors is hard," and that people who refuse to take their fair share of life's labour must of necessity suffer from depriva-

tion of their butter, if not of their bread. Her husband was an old man, and had lost money, and it was most exasperating that Honoré should refuse a splendid chance of securing his own future, and one which would most probably never occur again. To a good business woman, who did not naturally share in the boundless optimistic views of M. de Balzac for the future, the crass folly of yielding to the wishes of a boy who could not possibly know what was best for him, was glaringly apparent. However, being a practical woman, when she had done her duty in making the household—except the placid M. de Balzac—thoroughly uncomfortable, and had most probably driven Honoré almost wild with suppressed irritation, she embarked on the plan of campaign which was to bring the culprit back, repentant and submissive, to the lawyer's desk.

To accomplish this as quickly as possible, it was necessary to make him extremely uncomfortable; so having furnished his attic with the barest necessities—a bed, a table, and a few chairs—she gave him such a scanty allowance that he would have starved if an old woman, *la mère Comin*, whom he termed his Iris, had not been told to go occasionally to look after him. In spite of the gaiety of Balzac's letters from his garret, the hardships he went through were terrible, and in later years he could not speak of his sufferings at this time without tears coming to his eyes. Apparently he could not even afford to have a fire; and the attic was extremely draughty, blasts coming from the to his sister he begs her, when sending the coverlet for

which he has already asked, to let him have a *very* old shawl, which he can wear at night. His legs, where he feels the cold most, are wrapped in an ancient coat made by a small tailor of Tours, who to his disgust used to alter his father's garments to fit him, and was a dreadful bungler; but the upper half of his body is only protected by the roof and a flannel waistcoat from the frost, and he needs a shawl badly. He also hopes for a Dantesque cap, the kind his mother always makes for him; and this pattern of cap from the hands of Madame de Balzac figures in the accounts of his attire later on in his life. It is not surprising that he has a cold, and later on a terrible toothache; but it *is* astonishing that, in spite of cold, hunger, and discomfort, he preserves his gaiety, pluck, and power of making light of hardships, traits of character which were to be strikingly salient all through his hard, fatiguing career. In spite of the misery of his surroundings, he had many compensations. He had gained the wish of his heart, life was before him, beautiful dreams of future fame floated in the air, and at present he had no hateful burden of debt to weigh him down. Therefore he managed to ignore to a great extent the physical pain and discomfort he went through, as he ignored them all through life, except when ill health interfered with the accomplishment of his work.

Another characteristic which might also be amazing, did we not meet it constantly in Balzac's life, is his longing for luxury and beauty, and his extraordinary faculty for embarking in a perfectly business-

like way on wildly unreasonable schemes. With hardly enough money to provide himself with scanty meals, he intends to economise, in order to buy a piano. "The garret is not big enough to hold one," as he casually remarks; but this fact, which, apart from the starving process necessary in order to obtain funds, would appear to the ordinary mind an insurmountable obstacle to the project, does not daunt the ever-hopeful Honoré.

He has taken the dimensions, he says; and if the landlord objects to the expense of moving back the wall, he will pay the money himself, and add it to the price of the piano. Here we recognise exactly the same Balzac whose vagrant schemes later on were listened to by his friends with a mixture of fascination and bewilderment, and who, in utter despair about his pecuniary circumstances at the beginning of a letter, talks airily towards the end of buying a costly picture, or acquiring an estate in the country.

There is a curious and striking contrast in Balzac between the backwardness in the expression of his literary genius, and the early development and crystallisation of his character and powers of mind in other directions. Even when he realised his vocation, forsook verse, and began to write novels, he for long gave no indication of his future powers; while, on the other hand, at the age of twenty, his views on most points were formed, and his judgments matured. Therefore, unlike most men, in whom, even if there be no violent changes, age gradually and imperceptibly modifies the point of view, Balzac, a

youth in his garret, differed little in essentials from Balzac at forty-five or fifty, a man of world-wide celebrity. He never appears to have passed through those phases of belief and unbelief—those wild enthusiasms, to be rejected later in life—which generally fall to the lot of young men of talent. Perhaps his reasoning and reflective powers were developed unusually early, so that he sowed his mental wild oats in his boyhood. At any rate, in his garret in 1819 he was the same Balzac that we know in later life. Large-minded and far-seeing—except about his business concerns—he was from his youth a *voyant*, who discerned with extraordinary acuteness the trend of political events; and with an intense respect for authority, he was yet independent, and essentially a strong man.

This absolute stability—a fact Balzac often comments on—is very remarkable, especially as his was a life full of variety, during which he was brought into contact with many influences. He studied the men around him, and gauged their characters—though it must be allowed that he did not make very good practical use of his knowledge; but owing to his strength and breadth of vision, he was himself in all essentials immovable.

The same ambitions, desires, and opinions can be traced all through his career. The wish to enter political life, which haunted him always, was already beginning to stir in 1819, when he wrote at the time of the elections to a friend, M. Théodore Dablin, that he dreamt of nothing but him and the deputies; and

his last book, "L'Envers de l'Histoire contemporaine," accentuated, if possible more than any work that had preceded it, the extreme Royalist principles which he showed in his garret play, the ill-fated "Cromwell."

He never swerved from the two great ambitions of his life—to be loved, and to be famous. He was faithful in his friendships; and when once he had found the woman whom he felt might be all in all to him, and who possessed besides personal advantages the qualifications of birth and money—for which he had always craved—no difficulties were allowed to stand in the way, and no length of weary waiting could tire out his patience. He was constant even to his failures. He began his literary career by writing a play, and all through his life the idea of making his fortune by means of a successful drama recurred to him constantly. Several times he went through that most trying of experiences, a failure which only just missed being a brilliant success, and once this affected him so much that he became seriously ill; but, with his usual spirit and courage, he tried again and again. His friend Théophile Gautier, writing of him in *La Presse* of September 30th, 1843, after the failure of "Paméla Giraud," said truly that Balzac intended to go on writing plays, even if he had to get through a hundred acts before he could find his proper form.

One part of Balzac never grew up—he was all his life the "child-man" his sister calls him. After nights without sleep he would come out of his solitude

with laughter, joy, and excitement to show a new masterpiece; and this was always more wonderful than anything which had preceded it. He was more of a child than his nieces, Madame Surville tells us: "laughed at puns, envied the lucky being who had the 'gift' of making them, tried to do so himself, and failed, saying regretfully, 'No, that doesn't make a pun.' He used to cite with satisfaction the only two he had ever made, 'and not much of a success either,' he avowed in all humility, 'for I didn't know I was making them,' and we even suspected him of embellishing them afterwards." * He was delightfully simple, even to the end of his life. In 1849 he wrote from Russia, where he was confined to his room with illness, to describe minutely a beautiful new dressing-gown in which he marched about the room like a sultan, and was possessed with one of those delightful joys which we only have at eighteen. "I am writing to you now in my termolana," † he adds for the satisfaction of his correspondent.

We must now return to Honoré in his attic, where, as in later years, he drank much coffee, and was unable to resist the passion for fruit which was always his one gourmandise. He records one day that he has eaten two melons, and must pay for the extravagance with a diet of dry bread and nuts, but contemplates further starvations to pay for a seat to see Talma in "Cinna."

He writes to his sister: "I feel to-day that riches

* "Balzac, sa Vie et ses Œuvres, d'après sa Correspondance," by Madame L. Surville (née de Balzac).

† "H. de Balzac—Correspondance," vol. ii. p. 418.

do not make happiness, and that the time I shall pass here will be to me a source of pleasant memories. To live according to my fancy; to work as I wish and in my own way; to do nothing if I wish it; to dream of a beautiful future; to think of you and to know you are happy; to have as lady-love the Julie of Rousseau; to have La Fontaine and Molière as friends, Racine for a master, and Père-Lachaise to walk to,—oh! if it would only last always.”*

Père-Lachaise was a favourite resort when he was not working very hard; and it was from there that he obtained his finest inspirations, and decided that, of all the feelings of the soul, sorrow is the most difficult to express, because of its simplicity. Curiously enough, he abandoned the Jardin des Plantes because he thought it melancholy, and apparently found his reflections among the tombs more cheerful. He decided that the only beautiful epitaphs are single names—such as La Fontaine, Masséna, Molière, “which tell all, and make one dream.”

When he returned home to his garret, fresh interests awaited him. Sometimes, he tells us in the “*Peau de Chagrin*,” he would “study the mosses, with their colours revived by showers, or transformed by the sun into a brown velvet that fitfully caught the light. Such things as these formed my recreations; the passing poetic moods of daylight, the melancholy mists, sudden gleams of sunlight, the silence and the magic of night, the mysteries of dawn, the smoke-weaths from each chimney; every chance

* “Correspondance.” vol. i.

event, in fact, in my curious world became familiar to me."

Occasionally on Sundays he would go to a friend's house, ostensibly to play cards—a pastime which he hated. He generally, however, managed to escape from the eye of his hostess; and comfortably ensconced in a window behind thick curtains, or hidden behind a high armchair, he would pour into the ear of a congenial companion some of the thoughts which surged through his impetuous brain. All his life he needed this outlet after concentrated mental labour; and sometimes in a friend's drawing-room, if he knew himself to be surrounded only by intimates, he would give full vent to his conversational powers. On these occasions he would carry his hearers away with him, often against their better judgment, by his eloquence and *verve*; would send them into fits of hearty laughter by his sallies, his store of droll anecdotes, his jollity and gaiety; and would display his consummate gifts as a dramatic raconteur. Later in life, after he had raised the enmity of a large section of the writing world, and knew that there were many watching eagerly to immortalise in print—with gay malice and wit on the surface, and bitter spite and hatred below—the heedless and possibly arrogant words their enemy had uttered in moments of excitement and expansion, he grew cautious; and sometimes because of this, and sometimes because he was collecting material for his work, he would often be silent in general society. To the end, however, he loved a *tête-à-tête* with a sympathetic listener—one, it must be conceded,

who would be content, except for occasional comment, to remain himself in the background, as the great man wanted a safety-valve for his own impetuous thoughts, and did not generally care to hear the paler, less interesting impressions of his companion.

With what longing, in the midst of his harassing life in Paris, he would look back to the charming long fireside chats he had had with Madame Hanska; and as the time to meet her again came nearer, with what satisfaction special tit-bits of gossip were reserved to be talked over and explained during the long evenings at Wierzehownia! How he loved to rush in to his sister with the latest news of the personages of his novels, as well as with brilliant plans to improve his general prospects; and with what enthusiasm he poured out to Théophile Gautier, or even to Léon Gozlan, his confidences of all sorts! Plans, absurd and impossible, but worked out with a business-like arrangement of detail which, when, mingled with somnambulists and magnetisers, had a weird yet apparently fascinating effect on his hears; magnificent diatribes against the wickedness of his special enemies, journalists, editors, and the Press in general; strange fancies to do with the world where Eugénie Grandet or Le Père Goriot had their dwelling,—all these ideas, opinions, and feelings came from his lips with an eloquence, a force, and a life which were all convincing. Yet by a strange anomaly, which is sometimes seen in talkative and apparently unre-served people, Balzac in reality revealed very little

of himself—in fact, we may often suspect him of using a flow of apparently spontaneous words as a screen to mask some hidden feeling. Therefore, when people had considered themselves his intimate friends tried to write about him after his death, they found that they really knew little of the essentials of the man, and could only string together amusing anecdotes, proving him to have been eccentric, amusing, and essentially *bon camarade*, but giving little idea of his real personality and genius.

Even in these early days at the card-parties—where sometimes the hostess noticed the defection of the two young guests, and, holding a card in each white delicate hand, would beckon them to take their place at the game, which they would do with humble and discomfited faces, like schoolboys surprised at a forbidden amusement—M. de Petigny, Balzac's companion, must have been struck by his openness in some respects and the absolute mystery with which he surrounded himself in others. Where he lived, what he was doing, what his life was like—all these facts were hidden from his companion, till he revealed himself at last, on the verge of his hoped-for triumph. But, on the other hand, the sentiments and impressions of which M. de Petigny read afterwards in Balzac's books seemed to him only a pale, distant echo of the rich and vivid expressions which fell from his lips in these intimate talks. Magnetism, in which he had a strong faith all his life, was exercising his thoughts greatly. It was "the irresistible ascendancy of mind over matter, of a strong and immov-

able will over a soul open to all impressions." * Before long he would have mastered its secrets, and would be able to compel every man to obey him and every woman to love him. He had already, he announced, begun to occupy his fixed position in life, and was on the threshold of a millennium.

Balzac's glimpses of society were, however, rare, and ceased altogether during the last few months of his stay in the Rue Lesdiguières. However, other more satisfying pleasures were his: "Unspeakable joys are showered on us by the exertion of our mental faculties; the quest of ideas, and the tranquil contemplation of knowledge; delights indescribable, because purely intellectual and impalpable to our senses. So we are obliged to use material terms to express the mysteries of the soul. The pleasure of striking out in some lonely lake of clear water, with forests, rocks, and flowers around, and the soft stirring of the warm breeze—all this would give to those who knew them not a very faint idea of the exultation with which my soul bathed itself in the beams of an unknown light, hearkened to the awful and uncertain voice of inspiration, as vision upon vision poured from some unknown source through my throbbing brain." †

There was another side to the picture, and perhaps in this description, written in 1830, Balzac has slightly antedated his joy in his creative powers, and describes more correctly his feelings when he wrote "Les Chouans," "La Maison du Chat-qui-pelote,"

* Article by M. Jules de Retigny.

† "La Peau de Chagrir," by Honoré de Balzac.

and the "Peau de Chagrin" itself, than those of this earlier period of his life, when the difficulties of expressing himself so often seemed insurmountable, and the hiatus between his ideas and the form in which to clothe them was almost impossible to bridge over.

Writing did not at any time come easily to him, and "Stella" and "Cogsigrue," his first novels, were never finished; while a comedy, "Les Deux Philosophes," was also abandoned in despair. Next he set to work at "Cromwell," a tragedy in five acts, which was to be his passport to fame. At this play he laboured for months, shutting himself up completely, and loving his self-imposed slavery—though his want of faculty for versification, and the intense difficulty he experienced in finding words for the ideas which crowded into his imaginative brain, were decided drawbacks. While engaged on this work, he may in deed have experienced some of the feelings he describes in the "Peau de Chagrin," quoted above; for, curiously enough, "Cromwell," his first finished production, was the only one of his early works about which he was deceived, and which he imagined to be a *chef d'œuvre*. It was well he had this happy faith to sustain him, as, according to the account of M. Jules de Petigny, the circumstances under which the play was composed must, to put the matter mildly, have been distinctly depressing.

This gentleman says: "I entered a narrow garret, furnished with a bottomless chair, a rickety table and a miserable pallet bed, with two dirty curtains half

drawn round it. On the table were an inkstand, a big copybook scribbled all over, a jug of lemonade, a glass, and a morsel of bread. The heat in this wretched hole was stifling, and one breathed a mephitic air which would have given cholera, if cholera had then been invented!" Balzac was in bed, with a cotton cap of problematic colour on his head. "You see," he said, "the abode I have not left except once for two months—the evening when you met me. During all this time I have not got up from the bed where I work at the great work, for the sake of which I have condemned myself to this hermit's life, and which happily I have just finished, for my powers have come to an end." It must have been during these last months in his garret, when he neglected everything for his projected masterpiece, that, covered with vermin from the dirt of his room, he would creep out in the evening to buy a candle, which, as he possessed no candlestick, he would put in an empty bottle.

The almost insane ardour for and absorption in his work, which were his salient characteristics, had already possession of him; and we see that he laboured as passionately now for fame and for love of his art, as he did later on, when the struggle to free himself from debt, and to gain a home and womanly companionship were additional incentives to effort. At the time of which M. de Petigny speaks, however, his troubles appeared to be over, as the masterpiece for which he had suffered so much was completed; and joyfully confident that triumph awaited

him. Honoré took it home with him to Villeparisis at the end of April, 1620. He was so certain, poor fellow, of success, that he had specially begged that among those invited to the reading of the tragedy, should be the insulting person who told his father fifteen months before, that he was fit for nothing but a post as copying clerk.

NOV 7 1904

LB Ap '06



Deacidified using the Bookkeeper process
Neutralizing agent: Magnesium Oxide
Treatment Date: Feb. 2008

Preservation Technologies
A WORLD LEADER IN COLLECTIONS PRESERVATION

111 Thomson Park Drive
Cranberry Township, PA 16066
(724) 779-2111

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 020 419 762 3